



INTERNATIONAL WATERS EXPERIENCE NOTES

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2025

Building Blocks for Sustainability: Developing Wastewater Management Guidelines in St. Lucia



Abstract: The GEF CReW+ project in Saint Lucia aimed to, amongst other things, develop comprehensive wastewater guidelines to enhance local management practices. This initiative addressed critical issues such as underdeveloped water infrastructure and inadequate sewage treatment, which posed risks to public health and the environment. Through stakeholder engagement and capacity building, the project created practical guidelines that align with sustainable practices. The workshops eased community input, resulting in a robust framework for wastewater management. As a result, the initiative has led to enhanced operational standards and a clearer framework for wastewater management, supporting both environmental health and public safety. The guidelines not only serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders but also contribute to the development of a Wastewater Master Plan and enhance legislation for Saint Lucia. This experience note serves as a model for similar initiatives in other regions, highlighting the importance of collaboration and adaptability in transboundary water resource management.

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Building Blocks for Sustainability: Developing Wastewater Management Guidelines in Saint Lucia

Experience of the GEF - sponsored

An integrated approach to water and wastewater management in the Wider Caribbean Region using innovative solutions and sustainable financing mechanisms (GEF CReW+ Project)

GEF-ID: 9601

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The GEF CReW+ project is a partnership project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) that is being co-implemented by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 18 countries of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). This project builds upon its earlier successful phase “The Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management (CReW)” project (2011-2017). GEF CReW+ is being executed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Organisation of the American States (OAS) and the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention (CAR/CRU) on behalf of the IDB and UNEP respectively. The GEF CReW+ project provides innovative solutions and mitigation strategies for untreated water to improve public health and ecosystem services.

The main objective of the GEF CReW+ Project in Saint Lucia is to support the development of policy and regulatory instruments to improve water and wastewater management systems in its urban and island environments, as well as to channel resources for innovations in wastewater systems, thus reducing current gaps in services and improving water quality and environmental sustainability.

This Experience Note, focuses on the efforts to effectively promote water governance in Saint Lucia through the development of a wastewater guidelines which will contribute to the development of a Wastewater Master Plan (WMP) and Guidelines.

THE EXPERIENCE

Issue

Saint Lucia has faced significant challenges in managing its water resources holistically, largely due to gaps in the current policies and a lack of enforcement of existing regulations. One of the key weaknesses in the regulatory framework has been the lack of national water quality standards, which has hindered effective water management. However, significant strides have been made in recent years to improve the policy environment and address these gaps.

In 2016, recreational water quality guidelines were introduced, marking a step toward more structured water management. This was followed in 2017 by the development of the National Policy on Wastewater Management, which laid the foundation for more focused efforts in wastewater governance. These initiatives have contributed to a growing emphasis on sustainable wastewater practices, and the government is now developing a Wastewater Master Plan (WMP) and accompanying guidelines. These will build on the existing national policy, aiming to create a more robust framework for managing wastewater in line with modern environmental and public health standards.

Additionally, in 2018, the government completed the Sectoral Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan (SASAP) for the water sector, as part of the broader National Adaptation Plan. This strategy sets an overarching goal of implementing effective climate adaptation actions across all sectors of society to safeguard Saint Lucia's water resources amid the challenges posed by climate change. The strategy outlines four key outcomes and 13 strategic objectives, two of which are particularly relevant to water management. One objective aims to enhance the national policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks to

support climate adaptation in the water sector. Another critical objective focuses on improving wastewater management, aiming to reduce pollution and increase water availability, particularly in response to the challenges posed by a changing climate.

While Saint Lucia has made significant strides in wastewater management in recent years, it continues to face challenges in ensuring effective and sustainable practices. The island's wastewater infrastructure has historically been underdeveloped, with issues like untreated or inadequately treated sewage being discharged into the environment. This has led to water contamination, posing risks to both public health and the surrounding ecosystems.

Addressing the Issue

In response to these challenges, in particular the underdevelopment of its water infrastructure as well as the inadequate treatment of sewerage being discharged in the environment, the GEF CReW+ project supported Saint Lucia in the development of comprehensive wastewater guidelines, addressing key gaps in the country's policy and legislative frameworks. Historically, the lack of national water quality standards and enforcement mechanisms have hindered effective wastewater management. Through the CReW+ initiative, Saint Lucia received technical and financial support to craft guidelines that prioritize sustainable wastewater practices, aligning with both environmental health and public safety goals.

These guidelines serve as an important policy instrument, offering clarity on best practices for wastewater treatment, disposal, and reuse, which are critical to mitigating the country's pollution issues. The initiative helps strengthen the legal infrastructure, ensuring greater accountability and compliance from both public and private sectors. Furthermore, the initiative integrates community involvement, fostering broader societal engagement and long-term sustainability. This support complements existing national policies, such as the National Policy on Wastewater Management, and contributes to the broader goal of creating a Wastewater Master Plan, thereby bolstering Saint Lucia's ability to effectively manage its water resources in the face of climate change.

RESULTS AND LEARNING

The development of wastewater guidelines in Saint Lucia involved two key workshops. The first workshop laid the foundation for drafting these guidelines, while the second, held on August 9, 2023, focused on validating and enhancing the draft.

The second workshop was particularly significant as it brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from various sectors, including agriculture, water resources, hospitality, and youth. This inclusive approach ensured that the guidelines reflected a wide range of perspectives and practical needs. Participants provided feedback that helped refine the guidelines, making them more relevant and applicable to real-world situations. During the workshops, the guidelines were framed to cover critical areas of the sanitation value chain, including collection, conveyance, treatment, and disposal. This comprehensive focus supports effective wastewater management practices and ensures compliance with both national and international standards.

Experts emphasized that these guidelines not only serve as a practical resource for those involved in wastewater management but also align with existing policies and contribute to the long-term vision of a Wastewater Master Plan for Saint Lucia.

The developmental process of the Wastewater Guidelines draws valuable lessons learned that can be applied as Saint Lucia keeps embarking on the path to strengthening its Wastewater Management Policies and Regulations.

- *Stakeholder Engagement:* The involvement of diverse stakeholders—from government agencies to local communities—has proven essential. Engaging various sectors ensures that the guidelines are comprehensive and reflect the practical needs of all users. This collaborative

approach enhances buy-in and compliance, as stakeholders feel their concerns and suggestions are taken into account.

- *Flexibility and Adaptability:* The guidelines must remain flexible to adapt to changing conditions, including environmental challenges and technological advancements. During the workshops, feedback showed the importance of keeping the guidelines dynamic, allowing for updates as new practices or challenges arise in wastewater management.
- *Capacity Building:* Training and capacity-building initiatives are critical for successful implementation. The process highlighted the need for ongoing awareness building and support for local practitioners to ensure they are equipped to adhere to the new guidelines. This could include workshops, training sessions, and resource materials tailored to different stakeholder groups.
- *Integration with Existing Policies:* The new guidelines should align with existing national policies and strategies, such as the National Policy on Wastewater Management. This integration helps avoid conflicts, ensures consistency, and uses existing frameworks for more effective implementation.
- *Focus on Sustainable Practices:* Emphasizing sustainable wastewater management practices not only addresses current environmental issues but also prepares the community for future challenges, especially those related to climate change. The guidelines promote practices that enhance resilience, such as the reuse of treated wastewater and eco-friendly technologies.
- *Procedures to obtain a wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) construction permit:* The Wastewater Guidelines provide a step-by-step summary of the procedures and institutions involved in securing approval for the design and construction of a WWTP in Saint Lucia. This guidance document serves as a practical reference for practitioners, outlining the required processes from project concept through to the issuance of the construction permit.
- *Institutional control during the WWTP operation:* These Wastewater Guidelines also explain, from the institutional point of view, the approach for developing a Monitoring & Sampling Program. The Wastewater Guidelines are a good start for new future regulations in terms of monitoring.

REPLICATION

Replicating the experience of developing wastewater guidelines should be encouraged across the Caribbean when there is a lack of this policy instrument. Some of the implementation challenges that can be expected include engaging diverse stakeholders, reaching and involving all the critical groups can be challenging, particularly where there are fragmented governance structures. The success seen in Saint Lucia underscores the need for a commitment to inclusivity and the development of strategies tailored to effectively engage all relevant parties. Additionally, integrating new guidelines with existing policies presents another layer of complexity. To mitigate this, a thorough review of current policies and close collaboration with relevant authorities are essential.

Successful replication of Saint Lucia's experience also depends on several specific conditions. Strong leadership and political will from government officials and policymakers are crucial in driving initiatives forward and securing necessary resources. Additionally, creating a collaborative framework that fosters partnerships among stakeholders will ease more effective engagement and resource sharing. Tailoring approaches to fit local contexts is another key factor. Recognizing and adapting guidelines to align with specific environmental, cultural, and socio-economic conditions enhances their relevance and effectiveness. By addressing these challenges and fostering the necessary conditions, other regions can better position themselves to replicate the successful development of wastewater guidelines exemplified by Saint Lucia's effort.

SIGNIFICANCE

The experience of developing wastewater guidelines in Saint Lucia is significant for GEF IW projects as it exemplifies successful stakeholder engagement and capacity building in water management. By integrating community input and setting up clear operational standards, it fosters sustainable practices essential for effective transboundary water resources management. This initiative aligns with the GEF's goals of promoting regional cooperation and enhancing local governance, which are crucial for addressing pollution and resource scarcity. The lessons learned can inform similar efforts in other countries, supporting broader environmental and developmental goals across transboundary waters.

REFERENCES

www.gefcrew.org

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KEYWORDS

- ◆ Caribbean
- ◆ Saint Lucia
- ◆ Wastewater Guidelines

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